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ABSTRACT

Recent research on fathers' increasing participation in the care and development of their children is reviewed, and an overview of the father's role in the family is provided. Possible reasons for the increase in fathers' participation are suggested, foremost among them the increasing number of mothers in the workforce and the resulting need for fathers to help maintain the home and raise the children. Implications of fathers' increased involvement for early childhood education are explored, and parallels are drawn between the slow increase and low level of fathers' involvement in nurturing their own children and the small number of men employed as early childhood teachers and child caregivers. Difficulties of men functioning as caregivers are discussed. Aggressive techniques are suggested for use by those interested in achieving a better balance of men and women teachers in the field of early childhood education. (RH)

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Emerging Roles of Males as Child Caregivers: Fathers and Early Childhood Teachers

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Running head: EMERGING ROLES OF MALES AS FATHERS AND TEACHERS

Abstract

Recent research into the increasing participation of fathers in the care and development of their children is reviewed. An historical overview and possible reasons for the change are included, foremost among them the increase of mothers in the workforce and resulting need for fathers to help maintain the home and raise the children. Implications for early childhood education are explored, and parallels drawn between the deeper involvement of fathers in childcare, and of men in early childhood teaching and caregiving, along with the difficulties encountered. More aggressive techniques for achieving a better balance of men and women teachers in the field are suggested.

Emerging Roles of Males as Child Caregivers: Fathers and Early Childhood Teachers

Changing Roles of Fathers

After years, even centuries, of relative neglect, fatherhood is coming under increasing scrutiny, as the rapidly changing roles of mothers create an imbalance in the traditional mother/father roles. In the past thirty years or so women have entered the workforce at such a pace that today nearly 58% of mothers of children under the age of six work (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984). For school-age children (ages 6-17) the percentage is even greater: 73%. The forces that helped to bring about this change are enumerated by Hoffman (1977): the advent of contraception, longer life, higher education, and advances in labor-saving devices for the home, which in turn have reduced the amount of time women spend in child-rearing and homemaking and increased their opportunities for employment. Further, economic conditions have made it increasingly difficult for families to subsist on one income. Many wives are seeking fulfillment in contributions to the larger world as well as in the home. These changes inevitably affect husbands, as the need for their greater involvement in child-rearing and homemaking parallels the entry of women into the workforce.

Historically the role of the father has varied, but it has been primarily that of provider for the family and often owner of wife and children (Bloom-Feshbach, 1981). During the 16th to 18th centuries fathers not only owned their wives and children, but anyone residing

in the household. Children were thought to be "little animals," whose wills were to be broken to civilize them. The will-breaking was usually left to servants in upper-class families. In the nineteenth century the scope of the father's dominance narrowed to his immediate family. It must be said that despite this general pattern of patriarchy there were pockets of more equalitarian husband-wife and parent-child relationships throughout these times, e.g., in cottage industries where division of labor by sex was broken down, and husband and wife crossed traditional boundaries.

Legally patriarchal ownership was changed at the turn of the century so that a husband no longer owned his family. This change was brought about because it was argued that in case of divorce young children needed the tender care of their mothers. The "tender years" doctrine has recently been revised to consideration of the "best interests of the child" without regard to the sex of the parent, but in fact the "tender years" doctrine has prevailed regardless of the law. Fathers are generally not awarded custody, unless the mother is proven unfit.

In 1955 Parsons and Bales, the sociologists, defined the traditional roles of husband and wife as instrumental for the man, expressive for the woman. To Parsons and Bales the male role is instrumental in establishing relations from the family to society at large; the male is essentially the breadwinner. The woman's role is that of maintaining the stability of the family and providing emotional support, essentially being a peacemaker. With the advent of the industrial revolution men

were forced to leave their families daily for long periods of time, reinforcing the division of labor for men and women. The traditional pattern, of course, is already greatly changed, and the process continues toward an erosion of differences in male and female roles, but at a slower pace than one of its main causes, the entry of women into the workforce.

There are many reasons for this slower development of change in men's roles, but not the least is the resistance of many men to deviation from the stereotype of the instrumental male role, with concurrence of some women. In 1981, 85% of women believed a wife should quit her job and follow her husband to any new location to which his job might take him (Beer, 1983). Only 40% of American men ever cook, grocery-shop, launder the clothes, vacuum or wash the dishes. Eighty percent help with the children to some extent.

Even these figures represent an advance. In 1938, according to opinion polls, only one in five Americans believed that it was acceptable for women to work outside the home. By 1978 72% of Americans approved of women working outside the home, and the percentage surely must be greater now. Opinion of what constitutes maleness has also changed, from 52% of Americans believing physical strength was important, as late as 1968, to only 29% believing so ten years later. Being a good provider slid from 86% approval in 1968 to 67% in 1978. But being "handy around the house," the least instrumental category, declined very little in the same period. Also, in 1980 as many men as women (about 88%) were expected to

spend time with the children, although women still spent by far the greater amount of actual time doing so.

Another reason male role change has been slower is that men often feel they lack the competence of women in home-making and child-rearing. However, Beer (1983) found in his sample of men who were primary caretakers and homemakers, admittedly skewed by a predominance of upper-middle-class white males, that the men felt accomplished at most tasks and were almost universally enthusiastic about child care. Emerging research on fathering, which has increased almost exponentially in the past decade, indicates that men are equally as competent as women in caring for infants, even though tradition has it that women have a maternal instinct which makes them inherently better child caregivers. Child development theories, including Freud's, are built on the assumption that fathers are peripheral in child-rearing, at least in the very early years. Nevertheless, Parke and Tinsley (1981) found that fathers held, rocked, kissed, looked at, explored and vocalized with their infants as much as mothers. Further, they responded to the baby's signals, e.g., crying, feeding cues such as turning away when sated, and the like, just as often as mothers. These findings held for lower-income as well as middle-class families, and for families in other cultures. Fathers as of now, however, do not participate equally with mothers in child care, despite evidence that they can be as competent. Only 8% of American fathers are estimated to share equally in child care with mothers

(Kotelchuck, 1976). Mothers are still the primary caretakers, taking care of the baby's basic needs--feeding, bathing, diaper-changing, comforting distress--while fathers are secondary caretakers, focussing on vigorous play with the baby. Traditional fathers are more "for fun." A number of researchers have found that traditional fathers respond more to their infant sons than their daughters and the sons reciprocally relate more to their fathers by the end of the second year (Parke & O'Leary, 1976; Lamb, 1976). Thus fathers stimulate gender identification, and also have been found to contribute to children's intellectual competence, more to sons than daughters.

Modest amounts of research have been done contrasting dual-wage-earner families and the father as primary caretaker and their influences on their children, mostly involving middle-class whites (Radin & Russell, 1983). In dual-wage-earner families, interaction between parent and child was similar to that in father-wage-earner families, except that the working mothers were more active with their infants than mothers who were housewives. When the father is the primary caretaker and the mother works, it has been found that the father behaves more like the traditional mother in some ways, such as smiling and using high-pitched vocalization, but resembles traditional fathers in other ways, such as poking infants and playing games with them, a sort of synthesis of the two roles (Field, 1978).

As for the father's influence on the child, primary caretaker

fathers have been found to stimulate cognitive development, social competence and internality of control in both boys and girls to a greater degree than traditional fathers (Radin & Russell, 1983). They also enhance girls' sex role development, but boy preschoolers seem to adopt traditional masculine roles regardless of the orientation or role of the father. Abelin's (1971) observation of father-child relationships led him to believe that the father plays a vital role in helping the child separate from the early symbiotic relationship with the mother. In both Israel and the United States, studies have found that children generally thrive in homes where the father is the primary caretaker (Radin, 1982).

Further hindering fathers from taking a greater part in child-rearing are societal attitudes and working conditions which reflect a value system still oriented toward the traditional instrumental role for fathers (Bernard, 1981). Even in Sweden, where paid paternal leave is available for new fathers, only about 8% have availed themselves of the offer (Lamb & Levine, 1983). Research is currently under way to determine why, but meantime the most salient reason seems to be societal attitudes in general and particularly those of the Swedish fathers' employers, who may judge taking paternal leave as lack of dedication to the job. The structure of the labor force is perhaps the greatest deterrent to father participation, here as well as in Sweden. Men generally earn more than women, even when the mother works, making it economically less feasible for fathers to spend more time in child

care. The kinds of flexible work hours needed are also not generally available (Fisher, 1985). Another deterrent to father participation in child care is that fathers usually have higher occupational status and seniority than working mothers. Further, some mothers, especially those who are homemakers only, believe a father's participation is an intrusion on their territory and area of expertise. Even where both parents are committed to sharing childcare responsibilities, some problems in working together occur, usually trivial. Nevertheless, the benefits for wives and the children of father participation in homemaking and child-rearing seem to far outweigh the costs.

The social service system also engages in practices which limit paternal participation in the home and child-rearing (Lamb, Russell & Sagi, 1983). In the welfare system, for example, it is financially advantageous for an unemployed father to leave home rather than remain with the family. Recent changes in welfare assistance have been made in some states so that the unemployed father may remain with the family. Researchers have found that an unmarried pregnant woman may more often opt to have the baby and then to keep it because of the availability of public assistance for mother and children. It is also found that adopted children in two-parent homes make better developmental progress than similar children kept by single mothers. In regard to mental health clinics, lip service is given to the concept of engaging both mother and father in the child's treatment, but in actuality the

father is rarely seen. This, despite the fact that by far the greater number of child abusers are men. The hours in most clinics are not conducive to father-attendance, and further most clinicians for younger children are women. Also, children in residential institutions are cared for predominantly by women.

To understand the impediments to involving fathers more in child care, and to develop ways of opening the possibilities to more fathers, Levine, Pleck and Lamb(1983) have initiated The Fatherhood Project. The project includes research on male involvement in child-rearing in many areas: employment, law, education, health, social services and religion. Two innovative educational programs for boys and fathers at private New York City schools are being implemented for demonstration purposes. The third facet of the project is to disseminate information about the research and the innovative programs to interested parties, which might include employers, educators and grant institutions.

Males in Early Childhood Education

One would think, with the increasingly demonstrated value of the male role in child-rearing, and the actual and potential competence of men in furthering child development, that there would be more utilization of men in early childhood education, especially in view of the historic devotion of early childhood educators to the optimal well-being of children. Many early childhood educators have indeed lamented for years the lack of male teachers (Robinson,

1981). The benefits to young children of having male teachers have included the provision of masculine role models, showing males in nurturant as opposed to macho roles, and counterbalancing the pervasive influence of women in the early years (Robinson, 1984). It has been suggested that much of the difficulty young boys have in school adjustment in comparison to young girls is due to the demands of female teachers that they be less assertive and physically mobile, more traditionally "feminine" (Brophy, 1985). Some early childhood classrooms lack the equipment and curriculum in such areas as woodworking and science that attract boys (and may also attract girls). It is not the intent here to explore whether boys and girls have inherent differences which lead them to choose particular activities, or their choices are more social in origin, although research is leaning toward the view that there are few innate differences (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). The concern in this paper is with the possibility of a balanced approach to young children, wherein male child caregivers may counterbalance and complement female caregivers, to the benefit of both boys and girls in achieving self-identity, to whatever end the children choose.

Yet the entry of men into the childcare field lags even behind the slow pace of fathers into greater involvement with their children's care. Further, the percentage of male teachers decreases dramatically with decreasing age of the children: 48.2% in secondary schools, 16.7% in elementary schools, and a mere 3.1%

among childcare workers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984). The idea that early childhood educators are female seems so ingrained that the literature is virtually bereft of references to male child caregivers. Nor do books for young children very frequently portray male teachers (Goodhue, 1983), further depriving children at an impressionable age of a role model to emulate, thus helping to perpetuate the exclusion of males from early childhood education.

The reasons for this dearth of male early childhood teachers parallel in many ways those for the relative lack of involvement of fathers in their children's development. One is the low status of working with young children compared to other occupations, in itself a holdover from the days when any "female" occupation was, ipso facto, devalued. Seifert (1984) found that the men in his small sample of male early childhood teachers who had chosen the field had not experienced overt discrimination so much as they had been encouraged to seek job changes into more socially prestigious fields such as administration and teaching in the higher grades. Outright discrimination was present to a lesser degree, e.g., a principal refusing to let a male teacher teach a nursery grade, but offering grade 2. The men themselves described career goals out of the classroom, although usually still involving young children, far more than the comparable women teachers in the study. An added incentive for change is that the pay on the preschool level is low compared to that for higher educational levels, and far below that for other professions.

A related barrier to men entering early childhood education as teachers is the attitude still existing in America today that child care is women's work. The males who have opted for working with young children tend to be more androgynous than stereotypical males (Robinson, 1984), and in fact lean more toward the expressive characteristics Parsons and Bales (1955) associated with women: love of children, enjoyment of working with them and satisfaction of intrinsic needs. Until a larger proportion of men become more androgynous and/or perceive working with young children as an occupation for both sexes, there will remain an imbalance of females to males in the profession.

It is interesting that Fagot(1977a)found both male and female early childhood teachers reinforced stereotypically feminine behaviors (sensitivity, submissiveness, dependency) more than stereotypically masculine behaviors (adventurousness, independence, confidence) in both boys and girls. Incidentally, it has been found (Robinson, Skeen & Flake-Hobson, 1980) that actual teacher behavior in the classroom contradicted teachers' expressed opinions that they preferred boys to behave in "masculine" ways. One can conjecture whether with the addition of more men to the field there will be a more balanced reinforcement of "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors in children by teachers, or whether the current pervasive educational climate of emphasis on child conformity in the classroom will prevail. Men may succumb to the tradition in perpetuation of their own school experiences or, as Fagot (1977b) believes,

because of current teacher-training. Or male teachers in greater numbers may help tip the balance toward greater acceptance of assertiveness and independence in boys and girls alike. A clue is given in a study by McCandless, Bush and Carden (1976), in which inexperienced adolescent males were recruited to work in day care. The young men, who asserted they would not be pursuing a career in early childhood education, did reinforce masculine behaviors significantly more than did the trained female nursery teachers. However, these same young men also reinforced traditional feminine behavior in girls. Huston and Carpenter (1985) argue that it is as important for teachers to help girls to become more more independent as it is for boys to have less pressure for conformity. Curriculum-wise, the harm done to boys by over-emphasis on reading and the language arts in the early years, in contradiction of their greater interest in mathematics and science, is no greater than that done to girls in restricting them from activities which help develop mathematics and science abilities (Brophy, 1985). Thus the entry of more males into early childhood education must be accompanied by a more androgynous approach from both male and female teachers if the optimal development of both boys and girls is to be effected.

Societal factors enter into the lack of males in early childhood education, as they do into the degree of involvement of fathers with their children. Men, such as those in the

McCandless and all (1976) study just cited, hesitate to enter a field so dominated by women. To help accelerate the snail's pace of men's entry into the field, much more active steps could be taken. Trends already apparent will help. Carryover from the more active role fathers are beginning to take in child-rearing may lead them or their sons into early childhood education. The demands of teachers in the field to be given the salary and respect their important job merits may result in more compensation and prestige for early childhood education and increase the attraction for males. Linked to this are the results of burgeoning research which increasingly show the importance of the early years in child development, and the costs society pays for neglecting the education of young children. Too, as more women with young children enter the workforce, the demand for quality child care will grow, and the sheer numbers of workers needed may force attraction and recruitment of men to the field and concommitantly higher salaries.

However, beyond the societal forces affecting entry of men into early childhood education, more direct steps can be taken. Men must gain the feeling that they are as competent as women in caring for and interacting with young children. Training for young men in child care and development on the high school or college level, and for expectant fathers, should help. Men must also clarify their feelings and thoughts about what may constitute maleness and the male role if they are to view a

field currently dominated by women as an option for them, too. Conscious-raising groups in various settings, such as schools and community service organizations are possibilities. Certainly psychotherapists can help, as they work with both individuals and families (Moreland & Schwebel, 1981).

More directly, those in early childhood education can do much to bring men into the field. First and foremost, a commitment can be made by early childhood organizations to the urgency of greater involvement of men in the education of young children. It can be a matter of stated policy and publicized within and outside the field to that effect. Active recruitment can be encouraged.

It might be well to explore the attitudes and feelings of women early childhood teachers about the entry of men colleagues in greater numbers. The men in Seifert's (1984) study experienced feelings of alienation from female colleagues for several years after beginning to teach early childhood classes. Whether their feelings were subjective or objective is moot, but it seems reasonable that some women early childhood teachers might have doubts about male teachers entering the field, such as their nurturing qualities, or their masculinity. It is even possible that some teachers might resent entry into their "turf" and feel threatened by any greater influx of men, just as some wives may feel threatened by any greater involvement of their husbands in child care.

Early childhood educators can encourage young men to consider the field by campaigning for child development classes in high schools and by alerting guidance counselors to the possibilities for men in the field. Similar overtures can be made on college campuses. After all, the challenge and rewards of helping young children develop their minds and hearts at an age when their growth is most rapid should hold at least as much interest and commitment as developing computer programs or designing a bridge.

Early childhood educators can also further encourage participation of fathers in their children's education. They can be a source of education to the fathers as to their importance in child-rearing. Too often meetings are held at times working parents, fathers or mothers, cannot attend. Divorced fathers as well as the custodial mothers should be sent school notices and invited to conferences and to visit the school. Divorced fathers are beginning to militate in this direction, seeking court action when all else fails (Brooks, 1985). Children whose fathers are thus involved have been found to do better in school (Weinraub, 1976).

As more men enter the field of early childhood education, more young children can be exposed to a balanced influence of men and women in their lives, and in turn bring that experience to choices in their own lives as parents and workers. Choices are ultimately what are at stake. Educators can insure that children of either sex are presented with alternatives and are permitted to make their own choices of direction.

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